



PROJECT MUSE®

The Writings of John Dewey in Romania: Policy and Pedagogy

Nicolae Sacaliș

Education and Culture, Volume 22, Number 1, 2006, pp. 69-73 (Review)

Published by Purdue University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/eac.2006.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/200557>

by Sacalis's readership, and during subsequent conversations William Schubert suggested that JDS members might be interested in reading the original three essays. Also, Schubert maintained, many JDS members would not have necessarily expected a Romanian education journal to commemorate an anniversary date related to John Dewey and would be interested in a description of the "status" of Dewey's work in Romania. After a series of conversations with A. G. Rud, the current editor of *Education and Culture*, Sacalis was invited to prepare an essay describing Dewey's writings in Romania, published here along with the original three essays by Peter Hlebowitsh, Daniel Tanner, and William Schubert.

Dr. Sacalis, university professor at the National University of Theatrical and Cinematographic Arts (Bucharest), director of the Popular University Ioan I. Dalles (an open university institution in the Danish tradition), president of the National Association of Popular Universities (Asociatia Nationala a Universtatilor Populare, a nongovernmental organization), and founding editor of *Paideia* (established in 1993), has maintained a lifelong interest in the work of John Dewey and American education, a topic that caused him some degree of suffering during the Ceausescu dictatorship. He has written of his discovery of books by Dewey in a "special library" while studying philosophy and pedagogy at Bucharest University in 1968. Sacalis states that he made quite a commotion by presenting Dewey's life and ideas in a university seminar, and since that time he has been active working with others in the translation of Dewey's ideas and books into Romanian, including *Democracy and Education*. We thank Professor Sacalis for re-introducing Dewey to a generation of Romanian educators and for inviting members of the JDS to commemorate the life and death of John Dewey.

***The Writings of John Dewey in Romania: Policy and Pedagogy* by Nicolae Sacalis, Popular University Ioan I. Dalles, Bucharest**

William James could be considered the first great American academic to introduce pragmatism to Europe. A French translation of James's lectures, *Le Pragmatisme*, was published in Paris in 1925 and received widespread acclaim. With an introduction written by one of France's most important philosophers, Henri Bergson, *Le Pragmatisme* soon became popular in the intellectual circles of Europe, including Bucharest, and "this American novelty" known as pragmatism began to exert its influence in Romanian culture. Two years earlier, however, John Dewey's *The School and the Child* (*Scoala si Copilul*, 1923) appeared in Bucharest. Translated into Romanian by George Marinescu, director of the Scoala Normala (College of Education) in Bucharest and a very important educator who would soon become a general inspector of the Romanian Ministry of Education, *Scoala si Copilul* represented the Romanian version of the European edition, published by the Swiss psychologist Eduard Claparede, the champion of "new education" in Europe. With an introduction written by Claparede that outlined the innovative pedagogy of John Dewey,

Scoala si Copilul was well received by Romanian teachers and educators and was quickly released in a second printing. From the interest generated by *The School and the Child*, there appeared a Romanian edition of *Schools of To-Morrow* (*Scolile de Maine*), written by Dewey and his daughter, Evelyn Dewey, and translated by George Simeon, who was also a general inspector in the Ministry of Education. Interestingly, the writings of John Dewey were first introduced to Romania not by academics but by two senior-level administrators in the Ministry of Education.

This is not to say, however, that Dewey's ideas were unknown or overlooked by the Romanian intellectual community. Among the most important academics who were examining and discussing Dewey's ideas was Stefan Barsanescu, who, in his monumental work *Unitatea pedagogiei ca stiinta* (*The Unity of Pedagogy as a Science*, 1936), had given a comprehensive account of Dewey's writings. Also, Petre Comarnescu, who had studied in the United States, wrote about Dewey's logic in a 1927 issue of the journal *Revista de Philosophies* (*Review of Philosophy*), and Mihail Ralea, a graduate from the Sorbonne, presented a number of lectures about Dewey and American pragmatism in 1928 at the University of Bucharest. Yet it seems that Romanian teachers and school administrators were well ahead of Romanian academics in learning and implementing the latest American philosophical and pedagogical ideas.

In the following decades American pragmatism in Romania would grow so widespread that in recognition of Dewey's eightieth birthday in 1939 a book dedicated to this special event was published. *John Dewey: ca Pedagog: Viata si Opera* (*John Dewey as Pedagogue: His Work and His Life*), appearing in 1940, offered an excellent examination and thorough introduction to Dewey's life and ideas. It should be noted that the author, Romanian professor Nicolae Cretu, took his Ph.D. degree from a German university (University of Jena). At a time when German influence was predominant in Romania and Eastern Europe, Cretu would actually write an entire book about an American philosopher who was a foe of Nazi propaganda and ideology. Yet Dewey's eightieth birthday represented an important cultural event for Romanian educators. I doubt there were many other countries, if any, that produced a similar work as a celebration of Dewey's birthday.

Dewey's Appeal for Romanian Education

Undoubtedly the presence of Dewey's philosophy in Romanian school and society was related to the growth of urban and industrial society, brought about by the development of Romanian capitalism, and to a more practical and dynamic approach of education and human nature. But with the many very appealing aspects of Dewey's philosophy, his ideas resonated even more for Romanians because we were looking across the Atlantic for a new philosophy as a means to emancipate ourselves from the dominance of Western European culture, especially French and German, and to combat the very active communist ideology that was coming from the East.

Romania had been for centuries on the frontier and at the crossroads of the

great Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Austrian and Russian empires. And as a frontier country, Romania had borne the influences arising from these major powers but at the same time had always looked for other innovative ideas. Dewey's philosophy and American pragmatism offered such new cultural horizons. Cretu, in his publication, *John Dewey: ca Pedagog: Viata si Opera*, certainly recognized not only the pedagogical importance of Dewey's work, but also the geopolitical importance of pragmatism. Recall that in 1939 the Ribbentrop Molotov Pact was signed and Europe was falling under the control of the two big powers: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Unfortunately Romania, more than other countries, was squeezed between these two major powers and, like Poland, would lose its national integrity. Dewey's writing seemed to offer a third path between the old classical idealism of the Greek and German traditions, which was very entrenched in Romanian universities and academia, and the new Marxist socialism, which was spreading under the Soviet influence.

For Romanian scholars, pragmatism became not only a new way of thinking but also a different way of acting and a new way of life. Cretu would describe at length the connection between pragmatism and the American character and way of living. The pedagogical implications became obvious as Cretu discussed how in America everybody worked and how the young, the 20-year-old, tended to become independent and leave the family, a social custom that in Romania seemed unacceptable. Further, work, even physical labor, was not embarrassing in America, as it was viewed in Europe, and, as Cretu stated, for Americans "work, responsibility, liberty and dignity call you and get into your soul from all places" (1940, p. 25).

Once these premises were described, Cretu proceeded to discuss the more professional aspects of Dewey's philosophy. The logic of inquiry occupied an important component of his study. Why? Because pragmatism recognized both the role of experience and the role of ideas in the process of knowing, and represented a step forward for Romanian academics in contrast to the old European metaphysical quarrel between rationalism and empiricism. By this new logic of inquiry, Dewey severed the Gordian knot with one stroke, and Cretu, with great joy, proclaimed to Romanians that they could exit from the Platonic cave of ignorance.

Cretu, like Dewey, was not only a philosopher but also a pedagogue and academic. What he admired most were the pedagogical and practical consequences of Dewey's philosophy, which, for him, became "a science of education" and the main instrument to improve the human condition. Ultimately, Dewey's philosophy of education would remind Cretu of Plato's words: "There is nothing more divine than education; only by education does man becomes a human being" (1940, p. 83). What a beautiful liaison between two great philosophers over the centuries! We should remember, ironically, that these words were written at a time when the hideous and tragic aspects of World War II began to spread through Europe.

The Silencing of Dewey's Works

With the Yalta Accord, Romania would fall under Soviet influence and into a socialist-communist ideology, and during the subsequent Cold War Dewey's presence in

Romania came to an abrupt end. The Soviet pedagogues Anton Makarenko and Ivan Kairov, and Marxist-Leninist ideology, were put in their place. The shift is interesting from a broader perspective, too, since it displays, once again, that politics is often stronger than philosophy. Dewey had visited Russia in 1928 and was welcomed as a great philosopher, and his impressions about Soviet Union had been favorable. At that time, he believed that the Soviet revolution had brought about “an outburst of vitality, courage, confidence in life” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 477). In turn the Soviet state was also eager to emulate certain aspects of America and its achievements.

Later, especially, after his participation as chair of the Trotsky Commission trials Dewey’s ideas would change, and with the Cold War his writings were expelled from the Soviet camp, as Plato was expelled from Syracuse centuries ago. It seemed that the politicians enjoyed the company of philosophers, but only from a distance. Pragmatism was forbidden, seen as a philosophy of American imperialism. Needless to say, in Romania this new ideological orientation was also adopted, and overnight Dewey’s ideas were buried and his books were moved to forgotten library annexes.

This silence continued until the early 1970s when my colleagues Ion Gheorghe Stanciu and Viorel Nicolescu and I published the *Antologia Pedagogiei Americane* (*Anthology of American Pedagogy*), and Viorel Nicolescu and I translated Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* (*Democrație și Educație*). A few years later, *Trei scrieri despre educație* (*Three Writings about Education* including *The Child and the Curriculum*, *The School and Society*, and *Experience and Education*), edited by Ioana Herseni, V. Nicolescu, and O. Oprica (1977), was released. After years of Marxism, Dewey’s views sounded fresh and innovative. Romania, from the outskirts of an immense empire, was looking for new horizons and new ideas. Policy and philosophy, again, were working together as American thought was at least a part of the Romanian consciousness. Marxism was still the official philosophy but, meanwhile, Dewey’s ideas and works had become part of the common pedagogical wisdom.

Dewey: The Friend of the People and the Friend of Gods

After the revolution of 1989 and the end of blatant political oppression and censorship, there were no longer problems in talking about pragmatism. Unfortunately, however, too many Romanian educators began invoking Dewey’s ideas in what became a fashion. But recent publications are once again attempting to clarify what pragmatism means and its implications for Romanian education. An outstanding anthology of Dewey’s works, *Fundamente Pentru o Știință a Educației* (*Fundamentals for a Science of Education*), edited by Viorel Nicolescu (1992), was published, and articles about Dewey have appeared, especially in *Paideia*, that are introducing a new generation of educators to pragmatism. I was pleased to published essays by Professors Hlebowitsh, Tanner, and Schubert as a way to acknowledge the fiftieth anniversary of his death. Finally, it seems that the great advocate of democracy has been vindicated, and in Romania democracy has won one more battle. For Roma-

nians, Dewey is more than a philosopher and a great scholar. He is history and politics, and he is a friend of mankind and, as Plato would say, a friend of Gods.

References

- Barsanescu, S. (1936). *Unitatea pedagogiei ca stiinta*. Iasi: Alexandru Terek.
- Cretu, N. (1940). *John Dewey: ca Pedagog*. Institute de Aerte Graphic, Cartea de aur: S.A.R..
- Dewey, John. (1923). *Scoala si copilul*, translated from French by I.G.Marinescu, with an introduction by E. Claparede. Bucuresti: Case Scoalelor.
- Dewey, John and Evelyn Dewey. (c. 1925). *Scolile de maine*, translated by G. Simeon. This book is quite rare due, unfortunately, to the Communists' coming to power. Many libraries were burned, especially those with Western books, and many books of American philosophy, notably *Scolile de Maine*, were destroyed. Some people even burned their own books, afraid, much like those in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Also, "special libraries" were formed where books were deposited, never to be found again.
- Dewey, J. (1971). *Democrație și educație*, translated by N. Sacalis and V. Nicolescu. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- Herseni, I., V. Nicolescu, and O. Oprica (Eds.) (1977). *Trei scrieri despre educatie*. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- James, W. (1925). *Le Pragmatisme*. Paris: Ernest Flammarion.
- Nicolescu, V. (ed.) (1992). *Fundamente pentru o stiinta a educatiei*. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- Stanciu, I. G., V. Nicolescu, and N. Sacalis. (1971). *Antologia pedagogiei americane*. Bucuresti: E.D.P.
- Westbrook, R. (1991). *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

John Dewey and the Idea of Experimentalism

by Peter S. Hlebowitsh, University of Iowa

Widely known as a philosopher of American democracy, John Dewey always possessed a strong interest in schooling. Philosophers historically have made their marks by writing their views on logic, ethics, religion, truth, aesthetics and even reality, but very few have exercised their analytical acumen on the topic of schooling. Dewey, however, could not escape the connection that schooling had to his philosophical views, especially in relation to the concept of democracy; he even directed his own laboratory school at the University of Chicago, a rare activity for a philosopher indeed! Dewey, it should be said, also had substantive things to say about the social currents of his time, including issues related to the suffragette movement, labor unions, birth control, world peace, social class tensions, and societal transformations in Mexico, China, and Russia (Dworkin, 1954). A complete collection of Dewey's works is contained in a thirty-seven-volume work edited by Jo Ann Boydston (1979).